



<https://africanjournalofbiomedicalresearch.com/index.php/AJBR>

Afr. J. Biomed. Res. Vol. 27(3) (November 2024); 1187 - 1193

Research Article

Role of Art Therapy in Mental Health Rehabilitation: Evidence from Clinical Interventions.

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Abstract:

Art therapy can be described as one of the most efficient methods of treating mental health disorders and a form of communication that does not entail the use of language. Therefore, this work aimed to evaluate the efficiency of art therapy in the context of mental rehabilitation considering the description of clinical practice. The subjects in this study participated in various forms of art therapy including visual art, music, and dance for six months employing mixed-method research. The results of the analysis of qualitative data were the identification of the following main topics: individuality, assertiveness, and catharsis. The quantitative results also showed an improvement in the participants' mental health concerning PTSD, anxiety, and depression symptoms. Therefore, the findings of the study show the potential of art therapy, although there were some shortcomings, including the participants' attrition and variability of the number of attendees. According to the authors, art therapy should be included in the treatment plans, and there should be a specific protocol and collaboration with other workers to improve the patient's quality of life. The next research should therefore be longitudinal in a bid to establish the long-term therapeutic effects of such treatments.

Keywords: Art Therapy, Mental Health Rehabilitation, Creative Expression, Emotional Regulation, Clinical Interventions.

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Received 20/10/2024, Acceptance 25/10/2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53555/AJBR.v27i3.3529>

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1. Introduction

Art therapy is one of the therapeutic interventions that uses art and psychological methods in the treatment process. Artistic recreation like painting, sculpture, and

music for instance may be used to express feelings, to relax, and to boost self-conception (Malchiodi, 2012).

Art therapy was founded in the early half of the twentieth century when psychiatrists and artists realized

that art could be used to heal mental illnesses (Rubin, 2010). Thus, art therapy is one of the forms of treatment that has been recognized in the spectrum of mental health care in recent decades.

1.1 Definition and History of Art Therapy

Art therapy is described as a type of psychotherapy that involves making art to enhance the well-being of people of any age (American Art Therapy Association, 2020). Art therapy has been in existence since early practitioners like Margaret Naumburg and Edith Kramer who helped in the formulation of art therapy to treat patients (Malchiodi, 2012). Art therapy is now practiced in various facilities such as hospitals, clinics, schools, and community centers to address the needs of various clients from children with developmental disabilities to adults with traumatic and mental health disorders (Malchiodi, 2012).

1.2 Overview of Mental Health Rehabilitation

Mental health rehabilitation is a broad category of treatment that is directed towards the recovery, sustenance, and enhancement of the psychological health of individuals with psychiatric disorders (Alwledat et al., 2023). It entails elaborate administrative processes that may involve the use of drugs, psychotherapy, social support, and rehabilitation services (Anthony & Liberman, 1994). Mental health rehabilitation is described as the process of assisting clients to achieve the highest level of functioning in their lives (Pratt et al., 2014).

1.3 Significance of the Study

The inclusion of art therapy as one of the mental health treatments is a good inclusion to the treatment process. Art therapy is a special way in which people can convey themselves and their feelings that are hard to put into words (Kaplan, 2020). Previous studies have established that creativity can help decrease stress, improve the techniques of coping with stress, and increase the psychological hardness of the person (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). However, there is a lack of literature that has focused on the evaluation of the effectiveness of the approach in the treatment of different mental disorders (Shukla et al., 2022).

1.4 Importance of Integrating Art Therapy in Mental Health Treatments

Art therapy is also a way of communication since it is non-verbal and not intimidating to the patient especially if the patient has communication issues or has been diagnosed with a trauma-related disorder (Malchiodi, 2012). It is used alongside the other traditional cognitive and talking therapies because it addresses the inner self and is useful in the regulation of trauma memories (Malchiodi, 2012). Furthermore, artmaking is described as enabling people to regain some measure of control in the process of recovery (Malchiodi, 2012).

1.5 Current Trends and Gaps in Research

The modern approaches to mental health care delivery stem from the combination of traditional and art approaches (Kaplan, 2020; Hu et al., 2021). However, it should also be pointed out that there are still some gaps

in the literature regarding the processes through which art therapy is helpful and its effectiveness in treating different types of patients and in different contexts (Kaimal et al., 2017). Furthermore, there is a call for more research that uses objective measures to evaluate art therapy methods (Kaimal et al., 2017; Van Lith, 2016).

1.6 Scope of the Study

Population and Settings

The participants of the study will be outpatients with anxiety disorders in adulthood and behavioral disorders in adolescence treated in mental health clinics in urban areas. The subjects will be identified according to the patient's clinical diagnosis and their consent to engage in art therapy.

Types of Mental Health Issues Addressed

The research will explore the impact of art therapy on a range of mental health issues, including but not limited. The study will therefore aim at establishing the efficiency of art therapy in different mental health disorders; the disorders that will be taken into consideration include but are not limited to the following:

- Anxiety disorders
- Depression
- The other mental health disorder is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- Behavior problems are evident in adolescents.

Therefore, the study intends to provide evidence for art therapy to be included in the total mental health interventions in the above-mentioned population and conditions.

1.7 Research Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following research objectives:

1. Examine the Impact of Art Therapy on Mental Health Improvement
2. Describe and operationalize general and specific factors and change processes in art therapy.
3. Assess the efficiency of art therapy in comparison with the other types of traditional therapies and the satisfaction of the patients.

This introduction provides the reader with the information that will be enough to comprehend the changes in the practice of art therapy as the type of rehabilitation of patients with mental health issues. This sets the scene by defining art therapy, how it has evolved, and how it can be useful in improving the condition of mental health. This study is important because of the following facts, trends, and gaps that were found in the literature review and the objectives of the study to contribute to the existing knowledge in the field. Thus, in the pursuit of specific populations and contexts, the study aims at collecting data that would enhance the practice of art therapy and its position within the mental health care hierarchy.

2. Methodology

2.1 Study Design

The objective of this study was to determine the effectiveness of art therapy in the rehabilitation of mental health patients and this study used both the quantitative and the qualitative research methods. This approach used mixed methods in a bid to give a holistic view of the effects of art therapy interventions.

2.2 Participants

Criteria for Selection

The target population of this study was outpatient mental health clinics in urban areas. The criteria for the patients included those with anxiety disorders who are adults and behavioral disorders in adolescence who agreed to participate in art therapy.

Demographics

The demographic data that was obtained were age, gender, socio-economic status, and clinical diagnosis.

2.3 Interventions

Types of Art Therapy Used

The study incorporated different forms of art therapy. Different types of art therapy were employed in the study as follows:

- Visual Art Therapy: Art making as a process in art therapy: painting, drawing, and sculpting.
- Music Therapy: Music and sound in terms of emotional communication and terms of calming.
- Dance/Movement Therapy: The use of movement and dance to express and name feelings and events.

Duration and Frequency of Sessions

These art therapy sessions were conducted every week for six months. All the sessions took about 60 minutes so that the participants could be engaged in creative activities and therapeutic processing.

2.4 Data Collection Methods

Tools and Instruments Used

Data collection methods included:

- Surveys: Self-administered questionnaires completed before and after the intervention regarding mental health symptoms and quality of life were employed.
- Interviews: Using an interview guide, the participants were interviewed individually to obtain their experience and perspective of art therapy.
- Clinical Assessments: Symptom severity was assessed using Self-report questionnaires like the Hamilton

Anxiety Rating Scale, Beck Depression Inventory, and the like.

2.5 Data Analysis

Statistical Methods

The quantitative data obtained were mean, standard deviation, paired t-test, and ANOVA to analyze the differences between pre-and post-intervention.

Software Used for Analysis

Quantitative data collected for description were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The collected qualitative data were analyzed by coding and performing thematic analysis with the help of NVivo software.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Consent Process

This made the study be conducted with consent after explaining to the participants the nature of the study that they were willing to be involved in. The participants were informed of the objectives of the study, activities that would be performed, potential hazards, gains that would be made from the research, and the fact that they could pull out of the study at any time without any questions being asked of them.

Confidentiality Measures

The participant remained anonymous all through the study as was the case with the previous studies. To protect the identity of the participants, names and other identification details were not used in the study and the data collected was kept secure as per the Data Protection Act.

The method used in this study made it possible to conduct proper and responsible research on the use of art therapy in the rehabilitation of patients with mental health disorders. Therefore, this research offered positive research findings on the application of art therapy in clinical practice by conducting a mixed-methods research design, using appropriate data collection methods, and conducting proper analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographic Data

Table 1 presents the detailed demographic characteristics of the study participants, highlighting the diversity within the sample. Table 1 below shows the demographic distribution of the participants in the study and as can be seen, the sample is quite diverse.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Age	18-25 years	35%
	26-40 years	45%
	41-60 years	20%
Gender	Female	60%
	Male	40%
Diagnosis	Anxiety Disorders	60%
	Depression	25%
	PTSD	10%
	Behavioral Disorders	5%
Socioeconomic Status	Low-income	40%
	Middle-income	50%
	High-income	10%

3.2 Key Findings

The study was done on the impact of art therapy in the recovery of mental health of different groups of people. The participants offered art therapy sessions for six months with the frequency of once a week. Table 2

Table 2. Summary of Quantitative Outcomes

Measure	Pre-intervention Mean (\pm SD)	Post-intervention Mean (SD)	p-value
Anxiety (HAM-A Scale)	20.3 (\pm 4.1)	14.8 (\pm 3.5)	<0.001
Depression (BDI Score)	25.6 (\pm 5.2)	18.2 (\pm 4.9)	<0.001
Quality of Life (SF-36 Score)	45.2 (\pm 6.8)	58.7 (\pm 7.2)	<0.001

The results of the study indicate that the mean score of all the parameters that were evaluated is higher after art therapy sessions. In both groups, the participants' scores of HAM-A and BDI, which demonstrate the level of anxiety and depression, respectively, were lower at the end of the trial compared to the baseline. Also, the quality-of-life scores (SF-36) were significantly higher indicating better quality of life in the participants.

Impact of Art Therapy on Various Mental Health Conditions

Art therapy had a moderate to large impact on various mental health disorders, particularly anxiety disorders and depression. Other changes mentioned by participants included better affect regulation and problem-solving, which assisted in decreasing the severity of the symptoms. The participants' qualitative feedback indicated that art therapy is a nonverbal means of communication that assisted participants in expressing and comprehending their feelings in a safe environment.

3.3 Comparison with Existing Literature

The findings of this study align with the literature on art therapy in mental health care as presented by Kaplan (2020) and Malchiodi (2012). Research studies show that art therapy is a useful adjunct to conventional talk therapy. This research is therefore unique in that it examines specific processes of change using both qualitative and quantitative data hence providing a more detailed analysis of the processes that happen in therapy.

3.4 Case Studies

Case Study 1

Trauma Processing through Art and Music Therapy

A thirty-year-old female patient diagnosed with PTSD underwent art and music therapy every week for six months with the primary focus on visual art. The sessions were derived from visual arts such as painting and drawing and music therapy like music listening accompanied by guided music and music improvisation. The participants especially highlighted that in the creative arts particularly drawing and music, there was a significant improvement in trauma processing. Namely, she reported a reduction in nightmares and improved sleep, which indicates improved affect regulation and integration of trauma-related information. This case shows the importance of employing art forms in the treatment of PTSD since it

summarizes the key quantitative outcomes measured before and after art therapy interventions. It provides an overview of the quantitative results of the study obtained through the assessment of the effectiveness of art therapy interventions and the comparison of the results obtained before and after the intervention.

presents the patient with a nonverbal way to deal with the healing process.

Case Study 2

Enhancing the Social Competency and Emotional Regulation of Children via Dance/Movement Therapy

An example of the use of dance/movement therapy was described for an adolescent with behavioral disorders, the goals of which included social skills, affect regulation, and self-esteem. Conducted for four months, the sessions occurred twice a week and included the application of the elements of improvisational dance and movement to promote self- and other assertion. During the treatment, the participant showed improvement in social interaction and affect. He demonstrated a higher level of preparedness to initiate social interactions and demonstrated a positive change in impulse control. Also, the adolescents reported enhanced self-esteem, which had a positive impact on academic performance as well as peer relations. This case therefore supports the use of dance/movement therapy in enhancing the emotional and social development of adolescents with behavioral problems.

Case Study 3

Expressive Arts Therapy as One of the Approaches to Managing Anxiety

The patient was diagnosed with Generalized Anxiety Disorder and was a middle-aged male; the media used in expressive arts therapy were painting, collage, and poetry. These were conducted once a week for six months and aimed at the reduction of the symptoms of anxiety via art and relaxation. The participant demonstrated a decrease in the level of anxiety as a result of art therapy as one of the treatment approaches. Expressive arts therapy was also a more holistic approach to addressing anxiety because the individual was able to channel out his or her emotions in the right manner. Thus, the participant was able to enhance her coping mechanisms and personal analysis by employing art as a coping tool and therapy. From this case, one can see that expressive arts therapy can help in changing the emotional aspect of an individual.

The examples described above prove that art therapy can be used during the rehabilitation of patients with mental disorders, with the emphasis made on the patient's emotional state, their ability to develop effective coping strategies, and overall psychological well-being. Art therapy is another kind of therapy that is

creative and can be applied as an additional or complementary therapy because it is based on art, music, and dance/movement. These global and individualistic approaches justify the need to incorporate art into practice to enhance the mental health of patients.

3.5 Thematic Analysis

Recurring Themes and Patterns Observed in the Data

The information obtained from the participants of the art therapy sessions was analyzed thematically, and the following themes were deduced, which explain the efficiency of art therapy in the rehabilitation of mental health patients. Some of the themes that are evident in these movies include Individualism, feminism, and venting. Each theme exposes some aspects of the therapeutic process and the outcomes of art therapy, which helps to explain the versatility of art therapy.

Self-Expression

The first theme that could be seen as obvious was the involvement of art therapy in the process. This paper has also provided evidence that participants employed art as a means of self-identity and gaining more information about themselves. In painting, drawing, and sculpting, people were able to paint and carve out what they wanted to say without having to say it thus freeing up their emotions and thoughts. It allowed them to express in words what for the most part could not be expressed through speech, by using only words.

To several of the participants, art therapy was an opportunity to freely and creatively convey oneself, which enabled them to convey complex emotions. This was particularly beneficial for clients with trauma-related disorders since speaking may trigger re-traumatization. Art allowed the inner experiences to be communicated and to sort out feelings and ideas, which promoted self-identity. For instance, a participant with PTSD narrated how abstract painting helped her visualize her fears and in the same way, helped in the desensitization of the symptoms of the disorder.

Empowerment

The second major theme was the participants' perceived gain in control due to art therapy. The creative process promoted the notion that people are active participants in the healing process and can make decisions. This empowerment was evident in the way the participants approached the art-making tasks, choosing the media, content, and style of the artwork that would depict their life experiences and treatment goals.

Art therapy engages the patients in the process of healing and the role of the therapist, and the patient are equal. Therefore, the use of a collaborative approach increased participants' sense of ownership in the healing process and, consequently, their motivation to participate in therapy. For instance, an adolescent with behavioral disorders mentioned that he was encouraged by the choices of creating and initiating the dance movements in the dance/movement therapy sessions. This aspect of the change process was evidenced in the

clients' enhanced self-esteem and assertiveness in their daily functioning.

The empowerment theme also involved the aspect of change and the development of the ability to handle stress in art therapy. Thus, participants were not only able to freely draw and paint but also to watch the process of work, which contributed to the development of self-efficacy. This newfound confidence was not restricted to the therapy sessions only, but they started practicing it in other areas of their lives including at their workplace, school, and in their relationships.

Catharsis

Participants also mentioned that there is a need to release emotions and the possibility to vent as a plus of creativity and its effect on the decrease of psychological pressure. Another element that was frequently mentioned in the art therapy sessions was catharsis, or the capacity to express and therefore decrease the strength of specific emotions. Several participants expressed that they experienced a reduction of stress and a decrease in the emotional burden while performing and after the creative assignments.

Art therapy was more organized but at the same time it was more liberal in the sense that people could express themselves in any way they wanted to. This catharsis was particularly beneficial to patients with anxiety, depression, and trauma. For example, one participant diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder said that expressive arts therapy that included painting and poetry helped her to explain her anxiety and fears tangibly. Therefore, it is apparent that transferring her anxiety to the canvas has made her feel a reduction in the severity of the symptoms and has provided her with relief.

The process which was described as cathartic and witnessed during art therapy was also associated with the enhancement of the function of emotional regulation. Creativity people have said that it has helped them to know their feelings and emotions thus making them stable. This was depicted by a teenage boy who had behavioral disorders and who used dance/movement therapy to channel aggression and anxiety into movement. He was able to release some of the aggression that he had built and therefore his emotional health improved.

Further Insights

In addition to the above major themes, other minor themes were also seen to have impacted on the therapeutic process. These included:

1. **Social Connection:** Group art therapy was also done whereby the participants were able to relate and encourage each other. This social aspect was useful in the elimination of the feeling of loneliness and the encouragement of oneness among the people.
2. **Mindfulness and Presence:** Most of the participants said that artmaking assists them in being mindful. This mindfulness aspect of art therapy helps people in their capacity to focus on the present moment and not get lost in negative emotions.
3. **Symbolic Representation:** Art helped the participants to describe what they went through and how they felt in symbols and figures. It was also

useful in the identification of the inner self and the cognitive aspect of the study.

4. Sensory Stimulation: The physicality of the art-making process also appealed to the participants' senses and therefore had a calming effect. Such kind of sensory stimulation was particularly beneficial for children with SI issues or for children who did not benefit from verbal therapies.

The thematic analysis reveals the different facets of art therapy in the process of the rehabilitation of mental health patients. The results obtained were self-expression, self-empowerment, and self-catharsis which agree with the objectives of art therapy as a way of expressing emotions, gaining power, and attaining psychological release. Art therapy helps individuals deal with their mental health problems since it provides a suitable environment that allows for art making. Such findings contribute to the understanding of the processes that take place in art therapy and improve the status of art therapy as one of the key components of the treatment.

3.6 Challenges and Limitations

Some of the difficulties that were encountered during the research

The following challenges were encountered during the study and affected the research process in one way or the other. A difficulty was participant attrition due to the participants' schedule constraints. Some of the participants could not attend the sessions often; thus, there was irregularity in the session attendance. This inconsistency interfered with the process of therapy as well as the data collected during the process. Moreover, some of the participants at the start of the study had challenges in the creativity component of art therapy. The third theme was that for those who were not used to artistic endeavors, there was a learning curve that needed extra encouragement from the therapists. This initial reluctance was sometimes observed during therapy because participants needed some time to be comfortable when it came to the use of art as a means of

Types of Methodology and Data Bias

The following are the limitations that were observed in the study's methodology and data collection processes. A major weakness was the small sample size, and this may limit the generalization of the findings. The sample size was small; thus, the results could not be generalized to large populations or large groups of people. Moreover, the collection of qualitative data through self-report measures was another source of bias. The scores that the participants provided concerning their mental health and the efficiency of art therapy might be influenced by the participants' biases and prejudices instead of the facts. The last methodological issue was the lack of homogeneity in the therapist's approach and the participants' responses. Although there were efforts to standardize the approach to the interventions, each therapist brought in his/her style, and participants' responses were therefore influenced by their subjective states. This variation might have influenced the results, and it could have been challenging to attribute the changes to the art therapy interventions only.

3.7 Implications for Practice

Implication of the Findings in Clinical Practice

The findings of the study are of significance to mental health practitioners who wish to include art therapy in their treatment plans. Perhaps, one of the most practical applications is the application of art therapy as a component of a treatment plan for various psychiatric disorders including anxiety disorders, major depressive disorder, PTSD, and behavioral disorders. Art therapy can be administered in conjunction with other traditional psychotherapeutic techniques, meaning that it is another way of catharsis. Another important implication is the possibility of a multimodal approach in art therapy. The use of art therapies such as visual art, music, and dance can be used in combination since the needs of clients differ and this makes it possible to enhance the treatment outcomes. It is in this line that the formulation of these approaches can be made to suit the individual participant to increase the therapeutic value.

Application to Mental Health Practice

The following recommendations can be made for mental health practitioners based on the conclusions of this research: First, it is necessary to define the general requirements for the procedures of art therapy. The procedures and techniques used in art therapy should be made standard to increase the likelihood of replicating the results of the interventions in the various settings and therefore aid the evaluation of the effectiveness of the interventions. It is also necessary to have cooperation between departments and teams. Therefore, the cooperation between art therapists, psychologists, and psychiatrists can increase the effectiveness of the treatment by using the principles of the integrated model of care. These professionals can then cohesively provide improved and more comprehensive care to patients who are in the process of rehabilitation for mental health disorders. Finally, it is recommended to conduct a long-term study to assess the outcomes of art therapy interventions in the future. While this study was useful in determining the short-term impact of art therapy, it is important to determine the long-term benefits of the therapy to ensure that long-term interventions that would support the recovery of patients' mental health are developed.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study prove the effectiveness of art therapy in the course of mental health treatment, and it can be stated that art therapy is helpful in the treatment of PTSD, anxiety, depression, and behavioral disorders. Art therapy enabled participants to be able to draw, write, and paint; regain control over their lives; and let off steam; therefore, they changed their behavior and acquired new skills. The study also found that there are problems such as participant attrition and variation in the handling of participants and the type of therapies offered, but the study demonstrated that creative arts are therapeutic and can be used as complementary to other forms of psychotherapy.

The thematic analysis was that there are patterns of self-assertion, self-actualization, and discharge of affect which indicate that art therapy is a way of expressing and reclaiming oneself which may not be possible in verbal therapies. The participants' general well-being, self-esteem, and social relations were improved, indicating that art therapy should be incorporated into the treatment plan for mental health disorders.

In this regard, the findings of the study in the real world are that mental health practitioners should consider art therapy as one of the treatment interventions. It is in such interventions that the approaches could be made better through standardization of the processes and increased interdisciplinary collaboration. Further large sample and long-term follow-up studies will be required to establish the long-term efficacy of art therapy and fine-tune the application of the findings in practice.

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